

Meeting Notes:
Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area Advisory Group Meeting Held February 9, 2005

Group Members Present: Jim Baldo, Dan Howell, Mitch Wainwright, Lou Reeb, Mark Smith, Dick Ford, Cal Buker, Elmer Nofziger, Jim Anderson, Judy Smith, Dawn Smith.

ITEM 1: Group members were asked to introduce themselves and explain their interest in the wildlife area.

ITEM 2: Calkins gave an overview of WDFW's purpose for wanting to have advisory groups for each wildlife area and the planning process that has started. The advisory group purpose was read directly from the planning manual and then clarified. The word "credibility" in the statement was discussed. Calkins pointed out that these groups only lend credibility to decisions if the agency listens to the groups and tries to address their concerns.

Completing a plan for the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife area was identified as the first primary emphasis for the group. The wildlife area's satellite units were also discussed and that they would also be included as part of the plan.

ITEM 3: The drafts of the first two chapters of the WDFW plan version were briefly reviewed. The agency objectives and how they would be used in the plan was explained.

Chapter 2 was covered very briefly. Calkins explained that the entire meeting could be spent reviewing the historical information. Instead, the group was asked to review this information later and to contact Calkins if they found anything important to be missing or inaccurate.

ITEM 4: A list of goals that had been assembled from previous planning documents for the Mt. St. Helens Wildlife Area was presented to the group (Attachment). These goals came from the initial plan written shortly after the wildlife area was acquired and a white paper written following the elk winterkill in 1999. Each item was discussed individually to determine if it was still appropriate. Because some of the items were closely related the group decided that the goals could be consolidated somewhat and prioritized.

Consolidated and prioritized goals generated by the group:

- 1) Increase forage production for elk.
- 2) Control weeds.
- 3) Provide public access, education, trails, etc and reduce elk harassment.
- 4) Provide wildlife viewing opportunities.
- 5) Control elk population.
- 6) Implement measures to control erosion and resulting loss of elk forage areas.

It is important to note that one group member pointed out later in the meeting that fish really hadn't been discussed. We recognize that this will be an important component of

future management on the site and should be added as a goal that would include managing riparian habitat, which will be discussed at the next meeting.

The items that generated the most discussion were those related to forage and erosion protection. The group all seemed to agree that producing more and higher quality forage should be a top priority. The need for soil testing was emphasized and identifying appropriate treatments based on the results. Tilling, liming and replanting existing forage areas was recommended to increase production with supplemental feeding to take place while the forage regenerated. Some in the group were concerned that WDFW's recent efforts to plant trees and shrubs to control erosion of elk forage habitat may be a waste of money. Placement of large wood and/or rock gabions was discussed as an alternative that may be more effective.

The group came up with several ideas that potentially merit including in the plan. One was a recommendation to not allow any dogs on the wildlife area at all as opposed to the current rule that requires that they be on leash. Building trails was discussed as a mechanism to concentrate public use and potentially lessen harassment of elk. Some of the trail routes discussed were actually located on either Weyerhaeuser or DNR land and would require their cooperation. Providing better signing to educate the public on wildlife area rules and appropriate conduct was identified as a need. This idea included a better place for posting information about the site at the location on Weyerhaeuser property where most people leave their cars to travel to the wildlife area. Having volunteers serve as sort of a "campground host" was another idea that may help address educating the public. Adding more diversity to tree and shrub plantings was a concern because current efforts have predominately used willow and alder.

Some members of the group made recommendations on other organizations they felt should be invited to attend the advisory group meetings. These included the Cowlitz Tribe, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Geological Survey, Cowlitz Audubon and Washington Department of Natural Resources. (*DNR was invited but so far has chosen not to participate.*)

ITEM 5: The satellite units of the wildlife area were discussed. The group was surprised to learn that they are spread across five counties. The group understood that these areas could not be addressed in as great of detail at this time but some indicated an interest in those in the immediate vicinity of Silver Lake and the town of Toutle. Locally there is an ongoing effort to restore Harry Gardner Park, which is adjacent to one of the satellite units. Potential ideas here would include trails from the park through the WDFW site with viewing and interpretive opportunities. The "ball field" portion of the Hall Road Unit also generated some interest. Calkins pointed out that this site is on WDFW's surplus property list. *Some in the group are opposed to the agency selling the property* and would rather see it developed as a "wayside stop" along the highway with interpretive elements focused on the wetlands in the rest of the unit. One member also noted that there is a possibility of a land donation to WDFW of an island in Silver Lake.

ITEM 6: The group was advised that there currently is a plan in place for the Point Elliot Treaty Tribes to trap elk on the wildlife area and relocate them to the North Cascades in March and April. This is part of an ongoing effort as part of WDFW's North Cascades Elk Herd Plan. The group was asked for their input on the prospect of closing the wildlife area to public access during this effort. Most were concerned that closing the whole area would not be appropriate and would impact many user groups and that it coincided with the time period when people are starting to look for shed antlers on the site. The group's recommendation was to instead close that portion of the area immediately around the trap site. Part of the basis was that closing the entire wildlife area might cause some displaced users to try to retaliate by vandalizing the trap or otherwise attempting to thwart the effort.

WDFW's proposed draft WAC concerning public use on agency managed lands was distributed to the members and they were invited to review it and provide any comments to Calkins.

ITEM 7: The group was asked for any items that they would like to discuss at future meetings. One item "feeding elk" was mentioned. This was an item that came up during the course of the meeting but it was not fully discussed. Management of anadromous fish and riparian habitat as noted above will also be added as a future topic.

Attachment to February 9, 2005 meeting notes.

DRAFT goals for the Mt. St. Helens State Wildlife Area for discussion:

Produce the best quality, highest quantity forage for elk, with the emphasis on availability in winter through spring.

Control motorized vehicle traffic, except for administrative purposes, to reduce disturbance to elk.

Manage cover to improve the use of the area during the summer and fall by elk and other wildlife species.

Provide viewing and interpretation opportunities.

Control scotch broom and other noxious weeds.

Control erosion to prevent further forage loss,

Increase the total acreage producing forage,

Increase the overall area producing forage to disperse elk use.

Reduce human harassment of elk.

Increase forage production and overall diversity in forest stands on the wildlife area.

Over-seed existing forage areas to increase productivity.